

Socialist Worker

WATER CHARGES:

Revolt to bring down this government!

A huge movement of 'people power' is underway across Ireland – and the mainstream media like RTE are trying to ignore it.

In working class housing estates, thousands of people have turned up to street meetings and decided to resist the water charges.

Attempts to install water meters in Crumlin and Clondalkin have been foiled by mass civil disobedience.

In Sligo, Irish Water has withdrawn from estates like Cranmore because of successful resistance.

The state's response has been to deploy Gardai against peaceful protests. In Edenmore in Dublin they sent in the public order unit – the Garda's new riot squad – to intimidate.

And in a move that was similar to tactics deployed by the notorious Greyhound company, the Sierra company got a general injunction against anyone who tried to interfere with meter installation.

The state is also launching a propaganda war to intimidate people. The *Irish Independent*, for example, ran a headline recently which proclaimed that 'Water Bills will double if homes don't register'.

But the *Irish Independent* is owned by the media baron Denis O'Brien. This is the same individual who owns Sierra, the company contracted to install meters.

This paper is used as a weapon to enforce government policy through fear and 'divide and rule' tactics.

Some years ago, for example, it also ran a hate campaign against 'overpaid' public sector workers to back up the government's wage



cutting strategy.

Irish Water's only propaganda argument is that people who do not sign up with them will lose their 'free allowances' and so pay more.

But nobody will need a 'free allowance' if we fight to keep our water free. Or rather, to ensure it is paid for by central taxation rather than another charge.

If the protest movement against Irish Water escalates, we can defeat these charges. We defeated charges in 1996 (see inside) and we can do the same again.

But in order to do so, we will have to move beyond demonstrating to widespread peaceful

disobedience that makes this country ungovernable and forces a deeply unpopular coalition to resign.

■ The demonstration on October 11th is only the start. Enda Kenny will not listen to one demonstration. We need to step up the action – and do so continually until his government falls.

■ We need co-ordinated local anti-water protests as an immediate follow up.

■ We need to form local groups of activists that make democratic decisions on where the movement goes from here.

■ We need a national assembly where all anti-water charges groups come together to plan and discuss where we go next.

Our aim should be two fold.

■ We should launch protests on a national scale that brings tens of thousands onto the streets in a way that brings the country to a standstill.

■ We should also be so well organised locally that if Irish Water tries to turn off the water of non-payers, they shall be driven out.

And even if they succeed in turning off the water of a few households, we should be ready to turn it back on.

The stakes in this battle are incredibly high. For the past six years, government have loaded the costs of the Celtic Tiger crash onto the majority of working people.

They protected a wealthy elite and made no attempt to force them to pay extra taxes.

Each year they also pay out £8 billion to bondholders – the equivalent of the entire education budget – for loans taken out to shore up banks and the wider economy.

A defeat for the government on water charges will change all of this.

It will open the way for an offensive that stops austerity and makes the wealthy pay.

It will lead many workers to question why the Labour Party has a stranglehold over unions like SIPTU, who have abstained from the struggle.

It will help bring about a leftward shift in Irish politics.

But above all it will end the disease of defeatism and show that 'people power' really works.

Let the fight begin.

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Lockout at Greyhound Recycling ends

By Brian O'Boyle

After a battle lasting more than three months, the dispute at Greyhound Recycling is finally over.

The fight began on 17 June when the owners of the company locked out 79 workers.

This followed an ultimatum which demanded a 35% pay cut on top of extra hours and longer routes.

The company CEO, Michael Buckley, had planned his operation with military precision.

He calculated that a fight that began at the start of the summer would give him plenty of time before the schools were back.

This meant that any 'minor resistance' would be dealt with before the heavier volumes of morning traffic.

Buckley also had a team of scab labour waiting in the wings.

Within hours of the initial lockout, all of Greyhound's trucks were back in action.

He also had a line to the cops and a particularly aggressive legal strategy.

After less than a week, Buckley had secured a High Court injunction that barred all workers from 'interfering with the normal working of his business'.

This was designed to neuter the workers by undermining their union SIPTU.

During the first nine weeks of the lockout, Buckley's strategy worked a treat.

Activists and supporters did manage to slow down the trucks on a number of occasions, but SIPTU basically sat on the side-lines.



During late August a number of left-wing public representatives were also hauled before the courts.

In a manoeuvre designed to smash resistance, Buckley managed to secure a 'global injunction' preventing anyone from interfering with his operation.

If upheld, this would have been the end of the struggle.

Faced with the power of Buckley's money, a hostile justice system and a compliant union the workers could have easily folded.

This is exactly what Buckley thought would happen.

Like the rest of his class, Buckley

looks down on working people with a mixture of arrogance and contempt.

Socialist Worker has it on good authority that Greyhound bosses expected the resistance to descend into chaos. After nine weeks without any wages they thought the workers had finally been broken.

They thought wrong.

Resistance

On 25 August the Greyhound workers decided to take matters into their own hands.

Over the course of the next two weeks they held the gate at

Knocknacarra from early in the morning until six in the evening.

This caused major disruption to the Buckley operation, with two effects that were interrelated.

Self-Respect

On the workers' side a sense of rescued confidence emerged.

Workers who had previously accepted orders from SIPTU officials now began to make the decisions.

Speaking to SW Joe Hall captures some of the feeling

"Buckley forced us into a fight we didn't want."

"For a long time (too long really)

we did what our union expected.

We stood across the road and watched as the scabs went in and took our wages.

When our backs were to the wall we decided that we had to stand and fight.

Taking the gates gave us a sense of belief in ourselves and we had results in days that we never would have gotten if we remained on the side lines.

Militancy gave us the self-respect that we deserved and it forced Buckley to the negotiating table."

This was the other effect of the militant action.

After months of inaction Buckley finally put a deal on the table.

Moreover, the terms he offered were better than those demanded at the outset – 15-20% pay cuts for the 20 or so who held onto their jobs and 30% of the redundancy package; four weeks redundancy for every year of service for the 60 or so who lost their employment.

When Socialist Worker spoke to a number of workers afterwards they felt defeated.

After losing your job this is understandable, but the effects of this struggle are not so straightforward.

Looking back on it, there is absolutely no doubt that the workers would have lost by far more had they not gotten militant.

Money means that Irish bosses have incredible power, but the Greyhound workers showed it isn't invincible.

In the last days of the struggle Buckley was scrambling to save his business.

If the workers had managed to hold the gate for another few weeks who knows what might have happened.

As it is, the concessions that were achieved are having a positive effect on other workers.

Workers at the picket line of Rhatigan Construction wanted to thank their Greyhound counterparts for support and inspiration.

Standing up for yourself doesn't always win, but it always leads to better outcomes.

It would be even better if the workers had a union that was not strangled by Labour Party hacks.

Locked out rhatigan workers fight lowpay

Workers at JJ Rhatigan, who are members of the UNITE union, are on strike against an employer who is forcing people to work for low wages.

Rhatigan's have won a contract from the Department of Education to build schools.

These include schools in Griffeen and Kuhoge in Lucan, County Dublin.

One of the workers explained what happened.

'I was taken on by a sub-contractor who asked for my PPS number.

I contacted a number of

other bricklayers and labourers and told them about the job – so we all started at the same time.

'After a few weeks, I asked the sub-contractor about our pay and was told it was lodged into my account.'

'But when I asked about the sum of money, I was told that it was to cover the other bricklayers and labourers as well as myself.'

In other words, he had forced us to become self-employed sub-contractors – without our knowledge or consent.'

Forcing workers into this category is a familiar tactic



used by bosses in the building industry.

The national rate that a bricklayer should be paid is €17.21 an hour.

But the workers in JJ Rhatigan's were being paid less than €9 an hour.

The Revenue Commissioners state that sub-contractors must supply their own equipment and have an office or administrative centre.

But these conditions do not exist for the locked-out Rhatigan workers.

The self-employed status is only a trick to get them onto low pay.

There is a lot of talk about a recovery at the moment.

But the reality is that the building bosses are up to their old tricks.

If they get away with this it will destroy the industry said one worker.

The workers have been fighting for over two months and have put pickets on the Radisson Blu which is owned by Rhatigan's.

The real scandal, however, is that a Labour Party Minister for Education is deliberately allowing companies like Rhatigan's to flout their own rules.

SIPTU bans discussion on Labour Party disaffiliation

During the recent election for Dublin MEPs, SIPTU draped a large banner of the Labour Party candidate from its headquarters.

Many union members complained that their

union was supporting a candidate whose party was imposing pay cuts and water charges.

Subsequently, it was discovered the union had contributed to her election campaign.

In response to this, the Education Sector of SIPTU proposed a resolution for a divisional conference of the union.

It suggested that the union sever its links with the Labour Party.

The aim was to open a process of debate on the issue.

However, the union's standing orders committee subsequently ruled the motion 'out of order'.

In other words it will not let delegates discuss it.

The Labour Party hacks who control the union are terrified of real democracy.

They want to maintain bureaucratic control of the

union apparatus and force the Labour Party down our throats.

It is time we rid ourselves of these hacks and get a proper union back.

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WHAT THE SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY STANDS FOR

Capitalism is sucking the lives of millions and endangering the planet. A new society can only be constructed when the workers take control of the wealth and plan its production and distribution for human need and not profit.

REVOLUTION The present system cannot be patched up or reformed. The courts, the army and police exist to defend the interests of the wealthy.

To destroy capitalism, we need to remove the present state structures and create a workers' state based on mass

greater political and economic democracy.

AGAINST IMPERIALISM AND WAR War is a constant feature of capitalism today as the imperialist powers try to dominate the world.

FOR WORKERS' UNITY IN THE CLASS It is a crude device to attack any country which threatens US military, strategic or economic dominance.

END RACISM AND OPPRESSION We oppose all forms of oppression and racism. This divides and weakens the

existing class.

We are for full social, economic and political equality for everyone.

We oppose immigrations controls which are always racist.

FOR WORKERS' UNITY IN THE CLASS We stand for workers' unity against the Assembly, politicians and Capitalist government.

We stand for co-operation between left-wing parties and the formation of a strong socialist bloc.

We want to see an international socialist movement where all

workers gain.

Our flag is neither green nor orange but red.

FOR A REVOLUTIONARY PARTY To win socialism socialist need to organise in a revolutionary party.

This party needs to argue against right-wing ideas and for overthrowing the system.

We call for co-operation between left-wing parties and the formation of a strong socialist bloc.

We stand for fighting trade unions and for independent rank and file action.

Join the Socialists

Fill in the form and send to SWP PO Box 1048 Dublin 8

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Stink of corruption hangs over incinerator project

Work on an incinerator in Ringsend is about to commence. But the whole project is mired in scandal and incompetence.

Yet the key figure who pushed it through is none other than John Tierney, the present CEO of Irish Water.

In 2002, Dublin City Council issued a tender for a private company to design, build and operate an incinerator. Four companies applied but, bizarrely, a company which made no application got the contract.

This company was Covanta and, at the time, it had filed for bankruptcy in the USA. Dublin City Council's award of a contract to Covanta was therefore totally out of order.

Worse was to follow. The original tender was to build an incinerator that would cater for 400,000 tonnes and would be run as a private company for twenty years.

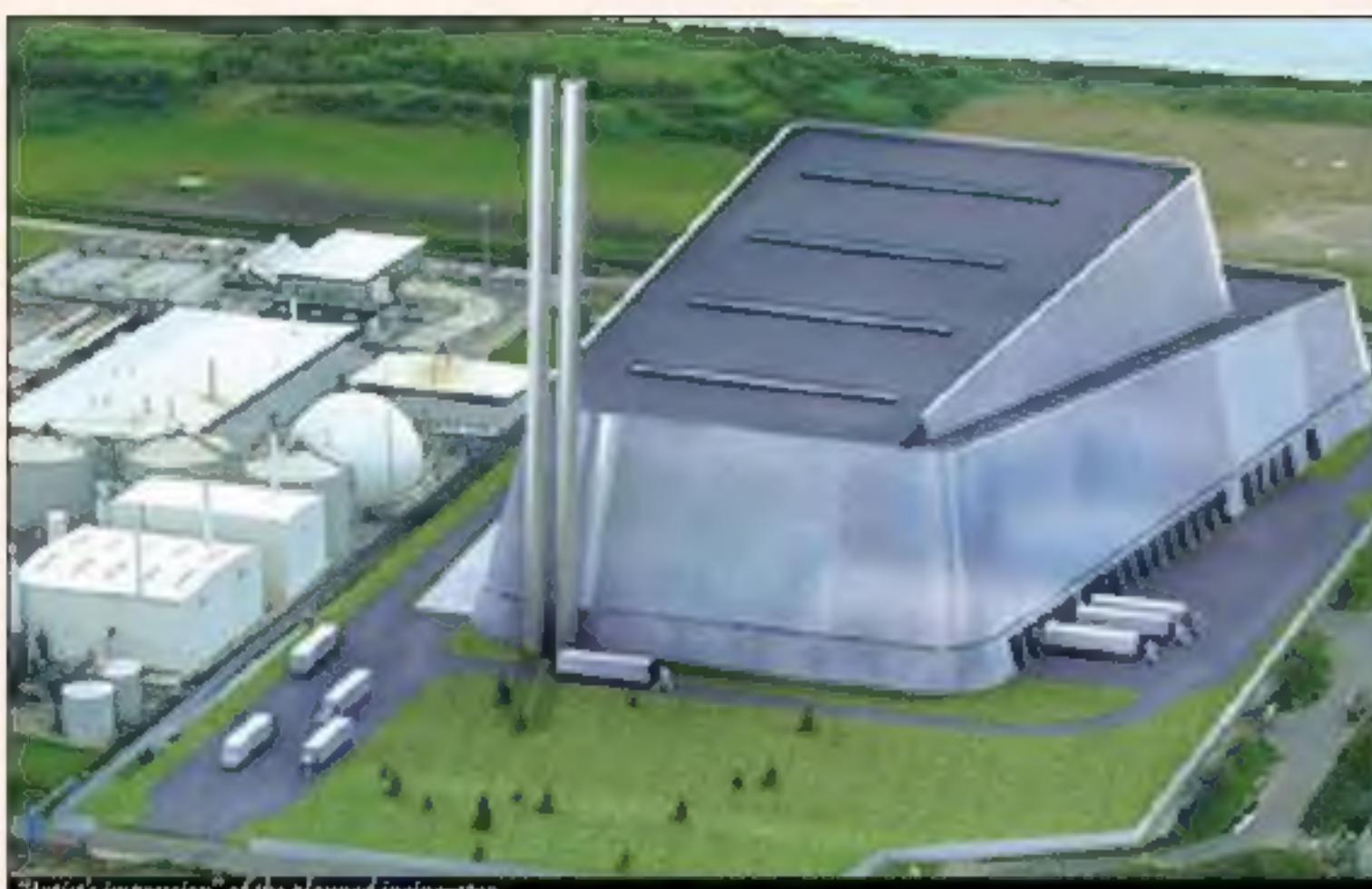
Yet the actual contract for Covanta was for a 600,000 tonnes incinerator and the company could keep possession for 25 years.

The increase in size was of some significance because it indicated that the vast majority of waste from the whole of Ireland was to be funnelled through the small suburb of Ringsend.

It also implied that waste would be shipped in from other parts of Europe.

Once Covanta won the project, the Dublin City manager John Tierney, sanctioned the spending of vast sums of public money on the project.

€28 million was handed out to private consultants – principally RPS – for pre-



"Artist's impression" of the planned incinerator

paratory work even though the original budget for this element of the project was supposed to be €8 million.

A subsequent auditor report found that 'no proper classification of expenditure on an invoice basis was available to account for monies spent' on Poolbeg by council management.

Similarly, over €22m was paid for new

premises for Westway Terminals Hibernian Ltd, which was moving from its original site in Ringsend to facilitate the development of the incinerator. Yet the original contract was for just under €12m.

Just like in Irish Water, vast sums of public money appeared to just melt away.

Yet even with these vast subsidies, the incinerator project stalled for years. Other

private waste collection companies took a successful legal case against a decision by Dublin local authorities to guarantee a supply of waste to Covanta.

At this point Dublin City Council could have withdrawn from the project – particularly as Covanta had missed some key dates in construction and investment. Up to very recently, many people thought



Phil Hogan



John Tierney

the project was effectively dead.

But Covanta had launched a massive lobbying campaign to get the terms altered to suit them.

The former US ambassador, Dan Rooney, weighed in to lobby on their behalf. The company also hired an estate agent, Arthur French, who had raised funds for Fine Gael, as its advisor. By pure coincidence, he was also a golf partner of Phil Hogan.

Once Hogan came into office, he began to take measures to assist Covanta. He withdrew the levy that the former Environment Minister, John Gormley, had imposed on waste going to incinerators. At the same time, the Dublin City Council manager gave Covanta an extension on its contract to enable it to raise funds for the project.

The results of these lobbying efforts have now borne fruit. Covanta has won a new contract from Dublin City Council whereby it will own the project for 45 years – rather than the original 20. They can also burn even more waste than was originally allowed.

Destroying a neighbourhood

Have you been to Ringsend? It stretches from Barrow Street to the iconic red lighthouse on the Great South Wall, and from Pigeon House Road to Beach Road and Upper Grand Canal Street.

It neighbours the villages of Irishtown, Sandymount, Ballybride and the Pearse Street area.

It's a grand little village with a proud maritime history which was once a peninsula accessible only through Ballybride, until land was reclaimed around it.

Spend more than a few minutes in Ringsend Park and you'll feel the effects of these waterways in the wind that follows them.

Although the incinerator plant is planned for Poolbeg it will accept, if not need, waste from across the country.

Then, after the trucks have wended their way from Donegal, Galway, Limerick, Cork, Waterford and the Greater Dublin Area they will proceed through the Port Tunnel and across the East Link Bridge.

Unfit for Purpose

A bridge, which is so narrow, it's unable to facilitate bicycle traffic and there are road signs on both sides giving testimony to this. It is, quite simply, unfit for purpose.

Built at a time when the docks were in decline and rarely walked or cycled, it was designed to facilitate vehicles avoiding the city centre.

Now, with the development along the quays from Butt Bridge to East Link and the provision of the Luas tram line, unforeseen numbers of pedestrians and cyclists use this bridge.

This, then, is the scale: numerous waste-filled trucks will take to feed the

incinerator

Now, back to the waterways of Ringsend. Our climate is a rather windy one and wind follows trams, seas and canals. So, although you may never have visited Ringsend, the contents of this massive incinerator may well be making their way to you. That's along the Liffey to Island Bridge, Chapelizod, Lucan, Lusk, Collymore and further on into Kildare, along the Dodder to Rathfarnham and Tallaght, along the Grand Canal past Rathmines, Irishtown and Clondalkin, and lastly via the Irish Sea from Howth to Dun Laoghaire and beyond.

World Health Organisation

However, unlike the emissions from the debacle that is the water treatment plant, which were improved but not fixed, the emissions from the incinerator will be odourless and may well contain harmful dioxins.

According to the World Health Organisation, 'Dioxins are highly toxic and can cause reproductive and developmental problems, damage the immune system, interfere with hormones and also cause cancer'.

We've all had more or less background exposure to them. However, increasing exposure events at increasing levels of exposure, increases health risks.

They go on to say that prevention or reduction of exposure is best achieved through 'strict control of industrial processes to reduce formation of dioxins'.

And according to the US National Library of Medicine, despite experiments it is still unknown what exactly causes dioxins or what mixture of elements, or what temperature can eradicate them.

Further 'More detailed investigation of the many individual factors influencing dioxin formation is needed to find ways to



East Link Bridge

reduce their formation'.

It is also important to remember that these things, once manufactured, don't go away easily, they hang around for a long, long time.

So back to our waterways, a cursory

Democracy – You must be joking

Over the fourteen years that the incinerator project has been debated in Dublin City Council, the elected members voted against it thirty times.

The most recent vote was 50 to 3 against the project.

But the unelected city manager has ordered the project to go ahead.

The notorious Waste Management Act permits him to over-ride the elected members.

Elected representatives are not even allowed to see the contract that has been signed by city council officials with Covanta.

This is despite the fact that auditors have publicly reprimanded these officials for lack of financial oversight in their dealings with the project.

At a public meeting in Ringsend, John Gormley, the former Environment Minister revealed that he could not get hold of full information



on the contract and was not able to order the Dublin City Manager to desist from signing it.

When a tiny number of unelected officials can force through a deeply unpopular project, where is democracy?

One is left with no alternative but mass civil disobedience.

Look at the map of Dublin shows that St James' and the Children's Hospital, Crumlin are all close to the Grand Canal, St Patrick's Hospital is close to the River Dodder too.

The Eye and Ear Hospital, the Convent,

St James' and the Children's Hospital, Crumlin are all close to the Grand Canal, St Patrick's Hospital is close to the River Dodder too. And who knows which way the wind will blow.

Mary Caulfield

Don't engage with Irish Water

Irish Water has sent out 'application packs' and is asking you to fill in details about your household, including your PPS number.

In a statement, People Before Profit said,

'There are two purposes to these packs

1) It is an information gathering exercise so they can charge you for using water.

2) They want you to accept water charges. You will be asked to declare that you are a customer of Irish Water. In other words, to give up your right as a citizen to water – and start paying.

The average per household charge will be €278 a year. But the charges will rise after that. One former ESRI economist has estimated that it will eventually be €600 a year.

'We can stop these charges if we come together and resist.

'We would urge you, therefore, not to fill in the form. You could send it back to Irish Water unopened or place it in your bin or simply ignore it.

'Don't let Irish Water or the government scare or bully you.

■ You cannot be jailed or fined for refusing to co-operate with Irish Water.

■ They cannot automatically take the water charge out of your wage packet or your social welfare because it is not a tax that the Revenue Commissioners control.

RTE: State censorship of protest

During the last month, there have been scores of major protests against Irish Water.

4,000 people turned up to a Dublin Says No 'lockout' event; 1,000 marched in Tallaght; hundreds more have marched in Athlone and Drimnagh.

But not a word of these protests have been recorded by RTE or much of the mainstream media.

In Edenmore, the Public Order Unit was engaged in protests with scores of protesters – again not a word was mentioned on RTE.

We do not have a 'free press' but a controlled media.

RTE is deliberately censoring news to try to prevent a protest movement growing. And much of the private media is controlled by media baron, Denis O'Brien.

However, the authorities did not predict that news of the protest is flying around Facebook networks all over Ireland.

Their censorship only shows how out of touch they really are.

How we defeated water charges last time around



Water protesters from the 1990's who fought the government and won

Government attempts to force Irish people to pay for water were defeated in the recent past.

In 1983, Dick Spring, the Labour Minister for the Environment brought in a measure that allowed local councils to levy special 'service charges'. His excuse was that domestic rates had been abolished by Fianna Fail and this left a shortfall in the funding of council services.

At an EU level, there were also moves to enforce water charges. Ireland was informed that under a Water Services Directive domestic users would have to be charged for water.

Campaigns of opposition developed in large parts of the country. Candidates for local elections promised that they would not introduce water charges if elected.

But many went back on their promises as the Minister for the Environment threatened to abolish their council if they did not charge for water. By the early nineties, most councils had water charges – with the exception of Dublin.

In 1994, the Dublin local authority was broken into four separate units, Fingal, South Dublin, Dun Laoghaire and Dublin City. This coincided with attempts to introduce water charges in the capital city. Councillors associated with Democratic Left – the forerunners of the Gilmore/Rabbitts wing of the Labour Party – went back on their word and accepted water charges.

Local campaigns of opposition got underway and in September a Federation of Dublin Anti-Water Charges Campaign was formed. Meetings were held in many estates and a major demonstration was organised for November of that year.

By today's standards, the turn-out was quite small with about 500 people in attendance. But while the demonstration was small, there was mass support for a boycott of the charges. Tens of thousands refused to pay and many joined the Federation of Anti-Water Charges Campaign by paying a small subscription.

The South Dublin Council responded by issuing threats to turn off the water of non-payers. But a network of anti-water charge protesters turned the water supply on again.

In areas like Clondalkin there were patrols to monitor the presence of council vans sent in to turn off water. The local authorities were unable to turn off the water of many non-payers.

The huge pressure from below then led to a change of tack by the establishment.

This coincided with a change of government that saw Labour and Democratic Left join a coalition with Fine Gael. They agreed to a measure which forbade councils to turn off water immediately. Instead councils had to first apply to the courts to see if non-payers had the means to pay and were deliberately refusing to do so.

The first court case was held in Rathfarnham.

But over five hundred people turned up to harangue the court. There were union banners and protesters from all

parts of the city. The judge could barely hear the words spoken in the court.

The campaign had also hired a barrister to defend its members who were taken to court.

Under such immense pressure, the judge finally threw out the case against the non-payers.

It was only at this point that RTE – which up to then had ignored the fight – reported on the issue.

In 1996, a bye election occurred in Dublin West and the Federation nominated Joe Higgins to stand.

Such was the scale of the popular revolt, that he came within 400 votes of winning a seat.

The scene was set for both an escalation of the protests and for anti-water charges candidates to challenge for election across the country.

Faced with this popular revolt and the prospect of electoral defeat, the political establishment backed down and abolished the charges.



FIGHTING WATER CHARGES...FIGHTING WATER CHARGES...FIGHTING WATER CHARGES



WATER: A HUMAN RIGHT?

'The one opinion, which I think is extreme, is represented by the NGOs, who bang on about declaring water a public right. That means that as a human being you should have a right to water. That's an extreme solution.'

Nestle CEO Peter Brabeck

Nestle is the leading supplier of bottled water. No wonder they hate the idea that water is a human right.

Sinn Fein and Water Charges: What is their strategy?

During the bye-election campaign in Dublin South West, Sinn Fein faced a challenge from the radical left who were promoting 'people power' as a way to fight water charges.

Their candidate, Cathal King, responded by claiming that Sinn Fein was the only party with a workable strategy to defeat water charges.

It was a big claim but King was opposed to 'other groups who prefer to concentrate on fostering aspects of campaigns which will ultimately hurt hard-pressed families in the long-run. This happened during the campaign against the property tax. Politicians on the "extreme-left" encouraged members of the public not to fill in forms but then abandoned them when those people received hefty financial penalties'.

The reference to the 'extreme left' was to People Before Profit and the Anti-Austerity Alliance who both ran candidates in the election. 'The charge that they abandoned people was simply rubbish.'

Fear tactics

The reality is that a mass movement to fight property charges was defeated by a combination of fear tactics used by the government and the failure of union leaders to back the fight. In a draconian move, Labour Party and Fine Gael TDs voted to give their government power to seize the charges from the wage packets and social welfare of homeowners.

But even though this was an outrageous attack on workers' rights, the leaders of the ICTU and SIPTU did nothing. Both these organisations are controlled by individuals who are totally loyal to the Labour Party.

Cathal King chose, however, to attack those who led a fight rather than the Labour Party and the union leaders who stabbed it in the back.

Irish Water is a public utility company

and is not part of the revenue gathering apparatus of the state. Legislation, therefore, does not exist to allow them to seize the charge from people's income.

But even if such legislation were to be introduced, a huge movement of 'people power' could force the government to back down. Unjust laws have always been challenged from below – and sometimes, if the movement is big enough – governments get defeated. It happened in 1996 when the government backed down on implementing an EU Water Services directive which demanded water charges from domestic users.

It also happened in the North – when contrary to a Sinn Fein claim that THEY abolished water charges – a mass movement from below forced both them and the DUP to withdraw proposals for charges.

Cathal King, however, clearly believes this scenario to be wholly unrealistic. He argues that water charges are now legal and that 'the way to stop water charges

is to get rid of that legislation. Sinn Fein has committed to do that if we become part of the next government.'

In other words, people need to obey the law and wait for Sinn Fein to join a government that will change those laws.

Defy

This is a somewhat ironic position for Sinn Fein to take. For nearly thirty years, they denied the legitimacy of Dail Eireann and had little compunction about staging an armed struggle. Yet when masses of people propose to defy Dail legislation, they urge them to wait and bring about a change by using the 'proper channels'.

The question remains, though, how 'realistic' is Sinn Fein's strategy.

Imagine the scenario if there were no mass movement of boycott and civil disobedience. Irish Water would have 'bedded itself down' and a mechanism would be well in place to collect charges. Government funding for the water services

would also be cut and Irish Water would become a 'self-funding mechanism'.

Let us grant that Sinn Fein did well in an election in 2016 or early 2017. But even their own supporters would not claim they are likely to form a majority government. They will, therefore, have to seek a coalition with Labour or Fianna Fail – both of whom support water charges.

Ireland is also subject to an 'excessive deficit procedure' laid down by the EU. They and the IMF and the ECB insist that water charges be used to pay for state debt.

The real question then is how realistic is it to expect Sinn Fein Ministers to face down all these demands for water charges – without the presence of an active people's movement that is actually resisting.

Given recent experience of politicians' promises, many would answer 'pretty unrealistic'.

Denis O'Brien and water meters

Denis O'Brien moved into the water metering business just before the current metering programme began.

O'Brien paid €45 million to take control of Sitserve, a company which has been described as an 'infrastructure and utilities support service'. One of its divisions is in civil engineering and its activities are described as 'water networks rehabilitation / water meters'.

The company had reported debts of €144 million and one of its chief lenders was Anglo-Irish bank. This toxic bank agreed to write off debt to facilitate the purchase by O'Brien. It is believed that just over €100 million was written off.

Other aspects of the deal are equally intriguing.

A rival French company, Altrad, has claimed that it was denied an opportunity to make an offer for Sitserve even though it was prepared to pay €15 million more than O'Brien for the company.

In 2010, the German company Siemens proposed to install meters throughout Ireland for a total cost of €810 million plus the cost of the meters. The former Environment Minister, John Gormley, was favourably disposed to the plan.

But when Phil Hogan came to office, the Siemens proposal was dropped.

Then in August 2013, it was announced that GMC/Sierra was one of three companies that had won the contract to install meters. Their contract was believed to be worth €62 million. GMC/Sierra was part of the Sitserve group owned by Denis O'Brien.



O'Brien's links with Fine Gael

Between March 1995 and June 1996 Denis O'Brien (or one of his companies) supported 14 Fine Gael fund raising events at which £22,140 was handed over to the party either personally or through a corporate vehicle.

The Moriarity tribunal, which was set up to investigate payments to politicians, found that Mr O'Brien made or facilitated payments to Mr Lowry (a former FG minister) of a combined £497,000 (£572,000) and supported a loan for a further £420,000 (£503,000).

In return it found that:

"It is beyond doubt that...Mr Lowry imparted substantive information to Mr O'Brien, of significant value and assistance to him in securing a Telecoms licence."

In 1995, Denis O'Brien made a £5,000 donation to Fine Gael to help fight a bye-election in Wicklow. The director of elections was Phil Hogan.

In the same year, O'Brien made a £4,000 donation to a Fine Gael golf classic. The main organiser of the event was Phil Hogan.



Hong Kong erupts

by Jimmy Yan

A wave of mass pro-democracy protests has rocked authoritarian rule in Hong Kong.

For several days, up to 100,000 have staged sit-ins outside the legislative council demanding universal suffrage in the lead up to the 2017 elections.

The movement, which began as a walk-out of 30,000 students, escalated into mass civil disobedience under the banner of Occupy Central with Peace and Love.

Undeterred by unprecedented levels of police violence on the evening of Friday the 26th September protests continued to swell. By Monday, riot police were completely forced off the streets. Demonstrators came prepared with umbrellas to defend themselves against pepper spray, earning the movement the name 'Umbrella Revolution'.

Violent attacks by loyalist thugs linked to triad gangs forced demonstrators to retreat from the districts of Mongkok and Causeway Bay to the central district of Admiralty. Among the ranks of the gangs were "off-duty" police officers. Student leaders have since called off talks with the government.

Fighting for democracy

In a city in which pro-democracy marches and vigils have been increasingly common, the explosive events of the past week represent an escalation of a long-standing 17-year struggle for democracy.

Demonstrators are demanding basic universal suffrage in the lead up to the first open elections for the Chief Executive to be held in 2017, and the resignation of current Chief Executive CY Leung.

Although Hong Kong has been granted semi-autonomous status, its residents are still denied the right to vote. The deeply unpopular CY Leung is colloquially referred to as "60%", a reference to the number of electors who voted for him in Hong Kong's Electoral Committee. Beijing have promised a popular vote for the 2017 election, but in August ruled out open nomination of candidates.

The latest wave of protests developed out of a week-long campaign of civil disobedience initiated by the student group known as Scholarism. Led by 17 year old student leader Joshua Wong, the group first emerged out of student mobilisation in 2012 which defeated the proposed introduction of "patriotic" content into the Hong Kong



school curriculum.

Last week, 13,000 students from two dozen institutions staged a sit-in outside government headquarters. Continued class boycotts by school students have shut down entire schools. The Occupy Central group had originally planned a mass campaign of civil disobedience for October 1 to mark the National Day Holiday, but instead followed the lead set by the students.

Workers and Students United

Significantly, several trade unions have joined the protests in the aftermath of Friday's police repression, calling a

one-day general strike in solidarity with the arrestees.

The Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions declared, "Workers must stand up... To defend democracy and justice, we cannot let the students fight the suppression alone."

On the 28th of September, Coca-Cola workers staged a sit-in outside the Siu Lek Yuen plant.

The beverage workers marched into Admiralty chanting "workers supports students". Alongside widespread student walk-outs, the teachers' union called on its members to strike.

A protest of 2000 social workers outside the Polytechnic University declared an indefinite strike in the community sector.

The involvement of organised labour can potentially shift the movement beyond a basic fight for political freedoms towards a struggle for genuine democracy over social and economic decisions.

One placard reads, "democracy and livelihood are inseparable".

Hong Kong is today the most unequal country in the developed world.

As a one-party corporate state, its political structures guarantee representation to big business.

Despite growing wealth for the rich during the Asian Tiger boom, one fifth of the Hong Kong population now lives below the poverty line.

Housing pressure and declining job prospects has underpinned growing opposition to CY Leung amongst youth. Discontent at neoliberalism expresses itself in opposition to a pro-Beijing economic elite.

Over two decades on from Tiananmen Square, a movement of students and workers in Hong Kong has shown that real democracy is not granted from above but will be fought for by the millions.

The Western Left should not repeat the mistake Ukrainian protesters did on Maidan

by Volodymyr Artyukh

The protesters that started gathering on Kyiv's main square ('maidan') almost ten months ago were driven by a certain kind of 'occidentalism'.

Europe, which stood as an epitome of Occident for them, presented a generalized image of Ukraine relieved from all evils: corruption, poverty, economic backwardness.

However, this vacuous image formed by the desires of the protesting masses, was filled by the content provided by political passions of groups, organizations and parties that struggled to dominate the protest.

For liberals it was the Europe of bourgeois democracy, free trade and developed financial markets, for national democrats it was the Europe of elusive 'European values' opposed to the Asian border, for the far right it was the 'Fortress of Europe' and for the few left-wing groups it was the Europe of social struggle.

While the brightest dreams of the Maidan coalesced in the image of Europe, the worst nightmares were projected towards Ukraine's East: Ukraine's own eastern regions, the stronghold of the then ruling elite, and its eastern neighbor, Russia.

Later, both dreams and fears turned into a nightmare of reality. The accident came with IMF conditional borrowing that stipulated cutting of budget expenses, freezing wages, raising energy prices for households and a set of other austerity



measures. The orient came with the Orwell-style propaganda, annexation of Crimea and aggravation of the military conflict in Ukraine's eastern regions.

By now, protesters of Maidan and anti-Maidan got the worst of both West

and East: economic imperialism of international financial institutions and military-political imperialism of Putin's regime.

The consequences on the ground are devastating: the worst economic downturn

since the 2008 crisis with thousands of workers that lost their jobs, with every household facing the challenge of heating their houses in the winter, with thousands of lives lost in a meaningless war and other tens of thousands displaced or lost the

roof over their heads.

Meanwhile, some western left-wing groups and parties repeat the mistake of the Maidan protesters: they create an equally Orientalized image of either anti-fascist 'people's republic' fighting against the Kyiv 'junta' or a democratic government harassed by an Asian despot.

They project their frustrated desires either onto the pro-Russian rebels or pro-Western oligarchic government.

It is true that the situation is complex and it takes time to analyze the concrete situation on the ground, but the analysis from a class perspective is never simple.

At the end of the day, the effect of the civil war in Ukraine aggravated by Russian military intervention has a truly devastating effect for Ukraine's working class formation and anti-capitalist struggle.

The workers are split between the ultra-conservative ideology of nostalgia for the Russian empire and nationalist ideology of the 'united Ukraine', devoid of any pro-socialist agenda.

Moreover, Russia's increasingly reactionary and chauvinist domestic policies distance the Russian working class from the Ukrainian.

These splits are reflected in the disintegrated and fragmented left in Ukraine and Russia.

The European left should be very careful and attentive in reacting to the Ukrainian crisis not to aggravate the deplorable workers' situation in Ukraine and invent relevant forms of solidarity and support.

Why bombing ISIS makes things worse



By John Molyneux

ISIS is a horrible sectarian monster of an organisation committing atrocities not only against individual Western citizens but also large numbers of their own people.

However, understandable revulsion at these atrocities is being manipulated to justify yet another war and military intervention in the Middle East.

If we look at the history of these many US-led interventions in the last twenty-five years there are three basic lessons to be learned.

First, the US war machine is not motivated by humanitarian considerations.

They are bombing ISIS for the same reason they invaded Iraq in 1991 and 2003 and back Israel against the Palestinians to maintain their control over this whole region which they consider vital both for its oil and for wider economic and strategic reasons.

Horror and atrocities are committed on a regular basis in many parts of the world.

Saudi Arabia regularly carries out beheadings; 47 students have been disappeared, probably murdered, by the Mexican police; eight UN peacekeepers were killed in Mali and so on.

If these atrocities are committed by a political ally, e.g. Saudi Arabia, or are in an area of little strategic interest e.g. Mali, the idea of military intervention is not even considered.

Only when it serves their imperialist interests do the American media shine a spotlight on the gruesome events and do politicians like Obama and Cameron start to say 'Something must be done'.

Second, ISIS – like Al-Qaeda and the Taliban before it – is a monster of western creation.

Third, it always relies on the method perfected by the British Empire, and used in Ireland of course: divide and rule by stirring up sectarian hatred.

This is true in the direct sense that

various pro-Western powers have assisted or armed the forerunners of ISIS when it suited their purpose of fighting Assad in Syria – just as they helped the Taliban when they were fighting the Russians in Afghanistan.

It is also true in the wider sense that the whole phenomenon of Jihadism and Islamic militancy is not some legacy of the middle ages but a modern response to the continued domination, exploitation, invasion and occupation of Muslim countries by US and other Western imperialist powers who have been carving up the region between them ever since oil was discovered there early in the 20th century.

Occupying and holding down hostile countries is a difficult business even for powerful empires. It always relies on the method perfected by the British Empire, and used in Ireland of course: divide and rule by stirring up sectarian hatred.

This is what the US did in Iraq back-

ing a viciously sectarian Shia government under Nouri al-Maliki, thus provoking a sectarian Sunni backlash which has built mass support for ISIS.

Bombing

Bombing ISIS was a reaction born of panic and fear when faced with the prospect that, seven years after invading Iraq and just as they were trying to pull out, they might lose control of the whole country and with it the region.

But bombing is only pouring more petrol on the flames. It can only stir up more sectarian hatred, more conflict, more barbarity as well as fuelling more anti-Muslim racism in Europe.

It is never reported that way but it is a simple fact that being killed, or horribly maimed, by a bomb that falls from 30,000 feet is in no way more humane than being beheaded or shot in the head.

In fact large scale bombing, as was done to Iraq, kills far more people and far more innocents as hospitals, schools, wedding parties and refugee centres are hit 'by mistake', than

any amount of terrorism.

Neither the USA, nor Britain and France, nor any Western-led coalition has any right to intervene in or control events in the Middle East or to impose governments that are to its liking. These are matters entirely for the peoples of the region themselves to resolve.

That they are well capable of doing so is shown by the great revolutions of the Arab Spring in 2011, when tens of millions of ordinary people took to the streets for democracy, freedom and social justice.

These struggles, including the heroic Syrian Revolution against Assad, were deeply non-sectarian in character and pointed the way forward for the whole region.

Of course they were defeated by a combination of local military repression and behind the scenes hacking from the US but that desire and potential for real democracy and freedom is still there.

The Arab masses will rise again and it is with them not Western bombing that real hope lies.

Ebola: Greed and moral bankruptcy

By Annette Mooney

The Ebola virus is currently ravaging Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia in West Africa.

In the last six months half of the seven thousand people infected with Ebola have died.

The speed by which this virus can infect so many people makes it the most severe acute public health emergency in modern times.

Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia have an average population of six million with up to 85% living below poverty levels.

Plagued by civil wars since the end of colonialism they continue to be exploited for their natural resources.

Contrary to myth, the Ebola disease is not easy to spread because it is transmitted only by direct bodily fluids.

Indeed, unlike AIDS, the Ebola incubation time is short (ten days on average) and those affected are contagious only during the brief period when they have symptoms.

Early diagnosis could lead to successful outcomes but without access to health centres the disease develops rapidly.

The particular conditions in west Africa have made it easier to spread.

These include no access to protective equipment, lack of existing drugs, no vaccine, lack of knowledge about the



disease and fear amongst communities that there is no treatment.

Families and entire villages have been shattered. Children do not play in school

yards.

Hospitals are overflowing and inadequately resourced.

People frequently care for their loved

at home leaving relatives of the sick and healthcare workers most at risk of the disease.

The government of Sierra Leone has

imposed curfews to curtail the spread of the disease. But the curfews are causing fear and isolation in communities. People can't travel to food markets or access wells for drinking water.

An earlier strong international response by providing the necessary treatment would have halted the need for such desperate measures.

Ebola has been known for thirty years but the drug companies have not focused on a vaccine because they saw little profit in it.

The Canadian experimental vaccine available later this year should be administered to frontline health workers as a priority.

There is also a need to provide better refrigeration in the region as the vaccines must be stored at -80 degrees centigrade.

The international sluggish response has led to the high mortality rates.

While Cuba and China send expert medical teams, Obama has sent 3000 military personal.

A greater sense of urgency and an accelerated response increased only after it appeared that the disease might spread beyond western Africa.

This is the first infectious disease that has killed people so quickly in modern times. Never again can the 'international community' allow what boils down to 'market failure' to create such catastrophic suffering for humanity in the world.

Socialist Worker

Tax the Rich No Welfare Reform No Budget cuts

Once again the Assembly finds itself in the depths of a political crisis, this time with parties failing to reach agreement over welfare reform.

As Sinn Fein and the DUP threaten the collapse of institutions, ordinary people across the North are facing the biggest attacks on living standards for decades.

The proposed bill, which has divided parties at Stormont, amounts to a whole scale assault on the welfare state.

If it goes ahead thousands will be plunged below the poverty line.

An estimated 242,000 families will have their child benefits cut.

Some 66,000 people, unable to work due to illness or disability, will face a £3,500 per year cut in allowances.

Families with disabled children will lose £3,500 per year.

On top of this 1,600 public sector jobs are set to be lost as a result of the £18 billion cuts being pushed by Stormont.

It is not so much 'welfare reform' as a whole scale attack- a systematic destruction of the welfare state.

Breadline

In typical Tory fashion those hit hardest will be those closest to the breadline.

The bill should be seen for what it is - an attempt by the Tory's and Stormont to make ordinary people pay for the recession.

The North has already experienced seven years of austerity, with ordinary people bearing the brunt of spending cuts.

Public sector workers have faced a pay freeze while the cost of living has soared.

Public services have been steamrollered, schools, leisure centres, hospitals and community sectors, have all been squeezed, their front line services suffering.

Sporting and cultural events such as the Open House Festival and Festival of Fools have lost their funding.

Libraries are now facing closures with over £3 million of cuts being imposed. Every department in the North is facing 2 percent spending cuts which in real terms



will mean job losses.

The health service also finds itself at breaking point with patients waiting up to 24 hours in A and E's.

Royal Mail and the Housing Executive are facing privatization.

Despite all this politicians tell us there is no option but to cut people's benefits as well.

Poverty

They plead poverty, saying there is no money to keep the public sector afloat. Yet last year the same politicians voted to give themselves a £5,000 per year pay rise.

Whenever they need money to go to war in the Middle East or to cover their own expenses, money is no object.

It is estimated Britain's new war on Isis will cost the taxpayer £3 billion per year. But when it comes to funding the welfare state at home politicians cry broke.

Shamefully, the DUP and UUP fully support the Welfare Reform bill. They are wholly committed to making those on the lowest income suffer.

Parroting Cameron and Clegg they argue

cuts are unavoidable and that we must 'face up to economic realities.'

But the economic realities are very different for those at the top and those of us at the bottom of society.

For the wealthy corporations at the top it is business as usual but for the vast majority of us at the bottom it is a struggle to make ends meet.

Sinn Fein, on the other hand, have taken a principled stance against Welfare Reform, a welcome position given their terrible track record in government over the last 7 years.

There is however, one glaringly obvious weakness in their new found radicalism.

They, along with the other major parties, still support the reduction of corporation tax in the North and have deplored Westminster to devolve these powers to the Assembly.

A reduction of corporation tax would only have the result of increasing inequality and would be a tax reduction for the wealthy.

It will benefit the 1% and shows a massive contradiction in Sinn Fein's strategy.

Westminster's decision to announce an £87 million fine on Stormont for not

implementing the reforms reaches new heights of hypocrisy, even for Cameron and his cronies.

Vulnerable

A cabinet of millionaires, who refuse to raise so much as a finger to confront tax dodgers like Google and Amazon, see fit to impose sanctions on the taxpayer for not attacking society's most vulnerable.

It shows the true nature of Tory policy, that it is one law for the rich and one law for the rest of us.

Over the coming weeks it is crucial we keep up the fight against austerity and cutbacks going.

On October 14 public sector workers will be out on a day's strike over pay and on 18 Oct there will be a march for a living wage organised by ICTU.

We should make the demands to all parties over the coming period.

1 - Raise Corporation tax, make the rich pay.

2 - No to Welfare Reform

3 - For a living wage now